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# The Myrtlewood Industry of Southwestern Oregon*

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The tree called in Oregon the Oregon myrtle, but known further south as the California laurel, is the only known species of the genus *Umbellularia;* its botanical name is *Umbellularia californica* (Hook. and Arn.) Nutt. *Umbellularia* is from the Latin *umbella,* meaning sunshade. The tree is sometimes erroneously referred to as bayberry, probably a confusion of this species with the California myrtle, *Myrica california* Cham. The California myrtle, called bayberry and "wax myrtle," gives off a faint aromatic scent which is much less pungent than that of the California laurel (Oregon myrtle). The "wax myrtle" is a smaller tree and hard and of no economic value.

Another confusion of identity is involved in the myth that Oregon myrtle grows only along the Pacific Coast and in the Holy Land. The Oregon myrtle is, however, not related to the myrtle of Palestine. The species of myrtle growing in the Holy Land is small and scrubby and quite different from the beautiful, regal tree of the Pacific Coast.

While the Oregon myrtle grows from the south fork of the Umpqua to the southern border of California, it is only in southwestern Oregon and northern California that it attains a growth suitable for commercial use.

In the valley of the south fork of the Coquille River can be seen remnants of gigantic myrtle forests. Most of these remaining stands are on damp sites along streams, and are mixed with Port Orford cedar, Douglas fir, or other soft woods. The fact that the Oregon myrtle grows best in such locations helps to account for the great depletion of myrtle timber that has occurred since permanent settlers moved into southwestern Oregon. Because the best stands were on the choice farm sites, the early settlers cleared the land and burned the timber they did not want for homes or furniture, thus destroying the finest of the myrtles. After the settlers came the lumbermen, who logged the Douglas fir and the Port Orford cedar, but, ignoring the value of the myrtles and other hardwoods destroyed them.

Somewhat later the beauty and utility of articles and panels made from myrtlewood were recognized, and the wood became commercially valuable. The result was that the supply of myrtle trees was still further depleted by novelty manufacturers and other woodworking industries until, as long ago as the first quarter of the present century, it was feared the species would be exterminated.

An attempt to estimate the amount of myrtle resources was made in 1916 by the Marshfield Chamber of Commerce. The survey indicated that there were from "four to five million feet of myrtle within reasonable distance of the railroad, besides other large tracts further distant. Much of the standing myrtle is in groves which are likely never to be used for commercial purposes, but there is sufficient that can be cut to warrant the manufacture of the wood."

Apparently large enough quantities of this timber were cut during the decade from 1914 to 1924 to cause further concern about the destruction of the myrtle. In the latter year, a story in the *Oregonian* stated that the use of myrtlewood for novelties was so depleting the groves that manufacturers were having difficulty in obtaining materials and were constantly combing the countryside of Coos County.

During the mid-1930s the Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station of the United States Forest Service began publishing timber inventory statistics for the counties of the state. The most recent revision (1948) shows an estimated 59 million feet, log scale, of myrtle trees of saw-timber size (minimum diameter of twelve inches, breast high, and with at least one eight-foot log to a ten-inch top). Of this supply, Coos County had 38 million board feet and Curry County 21 million board feet. This was virtually all the merchantable myrtle timber in Oregon. These are still the best figures available, but are not too reliable without adjustments for growth and depletion.

It is impossible to obtain accurate data concerning the value of the myrtle timber. A county assessor explains the difficulty in this way: "This myrtle is a timber that cannot be cruised and inventoried for taxation purposes like we do the conventional stands of marketable timber in the county. Much of the choicest myrtle for manufacturing comes from old stumps and fallen logs upon which it would be impossible to carry a taxable value."

Some public-spirited citizens, realizing that the pending destruction of the virgin myrtle timber would be a serious loss to Oregon, have attempted to take action to preserve the few tracts remaining in their original beauty. In 1946, members of the Recreational Resources Committee of the Portland Chamber of Commerce formed an organization called Save the Myrtle Woods, Inc., which now has membership across the state. The objectives of the organization are: (1) to save representative groves of myrtle; (2) to cooperate with national, state, and other agencies in establishing myrtlewood parks and other reservations or parks; (3) to purchase myrtlewood groves by private subscription; (4) to cooperate with the Oregon State Highway Commission, the Oregon Roadside Council, and other agencies to assure the preservation of trees and of the roadside beauty along highways in Oregon; (5) to support reforestation and conservation of our forest areas.

**Forms of Myrtlewood.** Three types of myrtlewood materials are utilized: the figure log, the cluster log, and the burl. Figure logs have a curly or wavy grain that is quite uniform. The fiddleback grain is one of the choice

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markings. A prominent logger of myrtlewood in Coos County has a series of colorful names depicting some twenty-four different grain characteristics in this wood.

Cluster logs have small burl-wood bumps distributed quite evenly over their surface and extending into the wood. Between the burl bumps, the log surface is quite smooth and often has the fiddleback grain. Cluster logs are considered choice if the bumps are uniformly dispersed over the surface of the log.

Burls are freak growths or swellings found on the trunks or limbs of trees. The cause of the growth is not definitely known, but it is sometimes attributed to injury of the tree; it may be caused by the development of buds. It is said to be possible to cause the growth of burls by banding a tree with metal or by repeated burning. Myrtle burls are found at the base of the tree, but not under the ground. They may sometimes be removed without injury to the tree, but more often the tree must be cut to obtain them. Myrtle burls for commercial use range from 400 pounds to as much as two or three tons each, but usually they average 700 to 1,000 pounds. Choice burls are not common, and are rapidly becoming even more scarce.

**Marketing of myrtlewood.** There is not sufficient volume of myrtlewood produced in a single location to enable even one operator to concentrate on the logging of this wood alone. Such logging as is done is incidental to other operations by regular logging operators. Large companies will not normally devote time to the logging of myrtle, although the Irwin-Lyons Co. of Coos Bay will occasionally log some. In Coos County there are at least thirty people, farmers and small operators, who spend some time each year getting out a few thousand feet of myrtle logs. In Curry County the situation is similar, but the number engaged occasionally in myrtle logging is known.

The principal channels through which the myrtlewood reaches the consumer are two, and each may vary somewhat. These channels are represented by Diagrams 1 and 2.

DIAGRAM 1

Logger → Veneer Mill → Mfg. of Furniture, Paneling, and Other Products → Wholesaler or Agent → Retailer → Consumer

Diagram 1 illustrates the channel through which the myrtle logs and burls which are made into veneer reach the consumer. Since American mills do not use myrtlewood for veneer as extensively as do European mills, much of the product marketed through the channel illustrated in Diagram 1 is exported. Usually the exporter is the logger, and it may happen that the manufacturer is also the wholesaler. Since furniture made from myrtlewood is often custom built, the manufacturer may sell directly to the retailer or

DIAGRAM 2

Logger → Mfg. of Turnery and Novelties → Wholesaler or Agent → Retailer → Consumer

even to the consumer. Myrtlewood furniture, paneling, and other such products are of fine quality and usually quite expensive, and are not stocked extensively either by wholesalers or retailers, but are made on order.

By far the greatest volume of myrtlewood reaches the consumer through the channel illustrated in Diagram 2, being sold in Oregon as turnery or novelties and going predominately to the tourist trade. This channel, too, is sometimes modified by elimination of the wholesaler or agent. The manufacturer is frequently the retailer, who sells through his own retail outlet to the tourist trade. There are a few manufacturers who are also wholesalers and sell to nonmanufacturing retailers, or who have agents in other parts of the country who take orders from retailers for the manufacturer's product. There are no manufacturing establishments of any size in southwestern Oregon that do not have their own retail outlets, even though they may do a wholesale business also.

There are myrtle burl and lumber exporters in Portland, Brookings, and San Francisco. Burl merchandising has been called the jewelry branch of the forest-products trade.

"Burls, source of fancy veneer for furniture and cabinet makers, are never dispensed in vulgar terms of board feet, but rather by the pound. Like precious stones, burls are where you find them. To discover them requires a bit of mining. They have to be studied before cutting into flitches, so that every possible valuable veneer may be recovered from the irregular shaped mass of wood.

"Let it be said . . . that the burl business is not part-time business for an amateur, which explains why there are fewer recognized burl houses on the Pacific coast than there are fingers on one hand. Without a thorough knowledge of what constitutes a commercially valuable burl, an inexperienced producer might spend many hours of back-breaking toil on a lumpy tree growth only to learn later that it is worthless, except for fire wood. The fruits of many days of misguided effort may be seen in the lofty cull pile at a Portland burl yard."[1]

For these reasons, experienced men inspect myrtle trees and check acceptable burls before prices are quoted. Prices may be on the basis of stumpage or delivered at the yard. The burls are graded on the basis of size, shape, and presence or absence of defects which would show in the veneer. Usually a burl must have a minimum size of 500 pounds. If of superior quality, smaller burls, even down to 350 pounds, may be accepted. Dimensions are also considered in grading. Minimum size should be approximately two feet high and nearly three feet in diameter. A minimum of two feet between the creases in the burl is another requirement. There must be at least fourteen inches of sound wood.

One Portland exporter says, "Strange as it may seem, the United States mills are very reluctant to use myrtle burls, principally on account of the expense in handling them, as most woods of this sort of freakish growth are more or less defective on the inside. Therefore, most of this product is shipped to Europe where a much cheaper labor market is available. Furthermore, the European mar-

[1] *The Timberman*, Apr. 1947.

ket is well posted on all fancy woods, including myrtle, whereas the American market knows nothing of the fancy wood field outside of walnut, mahogany, primavera, and one or two other woods."

Myrtle burls and choice figured logs sold in foreign trade go mostly to Europe—France, England, Switzerland, and Italy. The wood is used for veneer purposes only, not for novelties. The veneer is used almost entirely for fancy and always high-priced furniture and paneling.

It is impossible to find recent figures on the volume and value of myrtle burl and lumber shipments abroad. One reason for this is that most of the western hardwoods, including myrtle, are sold in such small quantities, compared with the softwood shipments, that the individual hardwoods lose their identity, and the whole shipment is labeled burls or hardwoods and may contain maple, myrtle, and other varieties. In 1937, however, "shipment of burls from the Columbia River was 1,388,380 pounds. These shipments were made from Portland to France and Italy principally—these countries taking 1,132,565 pounds of the total. It is estimated that the water movement of burls from California, Oregon, and Washington represents about twenty-five per cent of the total. Heaviest volume goes by rail to the Atlantic Coast for shipment to Europe and the United Kingdom. This is particularly the case with myrtle, redwood, and madrone."[2]

On the domestic market, burls and much of the myrtle lumber are purchased by western buyers, but some requests also come from hobbycraft shops in Chicago and veneer plants in Wisconsin, Maryland, and Illinois. The hobbycraft lumber is usually cut into three- or four-inch boards which the hobbycrafters rough shape into size and dry. The veneer is used for paneling and fancy furniture.

The local sales are all made in short seven- or eight-foot logs, which the buyers usually saw for themselves, although there seems ot be an increasing demand for rough boards cut into one-, two-, three-, or four-inch stock with an allowance of one-half inch for shrinkage.

Recently there have been no waterborne shipments of myrtle logs, burls, or lumber from Coos Bay, but burls and logs are frequently trucked to Portland for loading. The Southern Pacific Railroad at Coos Bay carries some shipments of myrtle. An informant explains, "Shipments are usually small, oftentimes from a local resident to a relative, friend, or acquaintance. Several years ago a car of myrtle burls was shipped to Kentucky. Recently a car of myrtle logs was loaded at Central Dock, Coos Bay, and forwarded to Cockeysville, Maryland."

**Manufacturing and Distribution.** At the present time, there are fewer than half a dozen myrtlewood factories that sell to retailers. The reasons usually given for not wholesaling are that so much more help is required and that it is necessary to sell on a smaller margin of profit. Also, a factory with its own retail outlet, if the workmanship is good and the location suitable, provides a good living and a pleasant life, and does not keep the owner's "nose to the grindstone" all twelve months of the year, as would the more demanding requirements of selling to a regular clientele of retailers. Adding the extra work of the wholesaler does not seem worth the effort; therefore most manufacturers sell most their own output at retail. The retail trade of a good shop can keep a man and his wife reasonably busy during the slack season stocking enough articles to supply the trade during a profitable tourist summer.

The wholesale trade is not seasonal, and the wholesalers have outlets all over the United States. One of the typical wholesale factories on the Oregon Coast has at least six agents who, collectively, cover the area of the entire country, selling myrtlewood products on a commission basis along with other novelty lines. They keep orders coming in regularly throughout the year. In addition, the factory has many customers up and down the coast who are owners of retail shops not manufacturing any products. All the factories have their own retail outlets; one of the larger establishments has one all-year retail shop in its home city, another in Los Angeles, and a third which is open only during the tourist season.

In Coos County there are at least ten companies that spend their entire time in the manufacture of myrtlewood novelties, and a great number who make the manufacture of myrtlewood novelties a part-time occupation. There are at least fifty retailers in the county who stock articles manufactured from myrtlewood. The retail valuation of the items sold in a year is estimated to be in excess of $100,000.

These retailers do a brisk business during the tourist season; but the small shops close during the winter. The factories and the gift shops in the year-round motels and hotels find some business throughout the year. The condition of Highway 101 has a direct influence on the volume of business in the myrtlewood shops. One large retailer finds that he has a steady business except when storms or repairs close the highway or make travel difficult. In a recent year, when it was estimated that the year's tourist business along Highway 101 was one-third greater than it had been the previous year, this retailer found that his volume of business had increased roughly the same per cent. Retailers seem to feel that their business will increase or decline in accordance with general tourist trade, and see no other important reason for a change in volume.

Several of the better-known establishments have printed descriptions and price lists of their stock and do a certain amount of mail-order business. One proprietor estimates that 95 per cent of his business is tourist trade stopping at the door, the remaining 5 per cent being mail order.

Each dealer in myrtlewood sets his own prices on his products, keeping in mind the prices of his competitors. He must include in his price considerations the materials he uses, if he manufactures the products he sells. He finds the cost of myrtle higher than the cost of other hardwoods because acceptable trees are scattered and must be felled and bucked with care to avoid breakage and worm infestation. Loggers of hardwoods are usually not sure of their costs. Some of the best esimates of costs per thousand feet, board measure, are: stumpage, $10 to $25; felling and bucking, $25; yarding and loading, $15 to $30. This explains the fact that the price of green myrtle logs averages about $100 per thousand, plus truckage from more outlying points. If the logs are hauled no more than twenty or thirty miles, the delivered price is usually around $100 per thousand. Irwin-Lyons sold myrtle logs in 1952 for this price.

Most myrtlewood factory operators do their own milling. Hardwood mill operators estimate that milling costs for myrtlewood are $25 to $30 per thousand feet. As with other hardwood lumber, prices on myrtle lumber and spe-

[2] *The Timberman*, Aug. 1938.

# OREGON POPULATION ESTIMATES—JULY 1, 1953

The vital statistics section of the Oregon State Board of Health has prepared a population estimate by counties of Oregon as of July 1, 1953. The method used in the computation of these estimates is based on the excess of resident births over resident deaths, plus or minus estimated migration into or out of the area. Birth and death figures are based on vital statistics filed with the Board of Health. The estimated migrations for each area is based primarily on a formula involving elementary-school enrollment, prepared by the U. S. Bureau of the Census.

| | *Estimated Population, July 1, 1953 (to nearest hundred)* | *Fed. Census Apr. 1, 1950* | *Per Cent Change Apr. 1, 1950 to July 1, 1953* | *Per Cent Change July 1, 1952 to July 1, 1953* | *Natural Increase Apr. 1, 1950 to July 1, 1953* | *Migration Apr. 1, 1950 to July 1, 1953* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baker | 15,600 | 16,175 | − 3.6 | − 2.2 | 622 | − 1,206 |
| Benton | 35,000 | 31,570 | +10.7 | + 0.3 | 1,918 | + 1,478 |
| Clackamas | 92,000 | 86,716 | + 6.0 | + 3.7 | 4,439 | + 811 |
| Clatsop | 31,500 | 30,776 | + 2.4 | + 3.0 | 1,608 | − 861 |
| Columbia | 21,700 | 22,967 | − 5.4 | + 0.6 | 973 | − 2,251 |
| Coos | 52,100 | 42,265 | +23.3 | + 6.8 | 2,997 | + 6,849 |
| Crook | 9,000 | 8,991 | + 0.6 | − 1.7 | 667 | − 623 |
| Curry | 8,400 | 6,048 | +38.4 | +19.7 | 389 | + 1,935 |
| Deschutes | 20,300 | 21,812 | − 6.9 | + 0.4 | 1,076 | − 2,578 |
| Douglas | 66,000 | 54,549 | +20.9 | + 5.4 | 4,020 | + 7,394 |
| Gilliam | 3,100 | 2,817 | + 8.5 | + 6.8 | 165 | + 76 |
| Grant | 8,600 | 8,329 | + 3.8 | + 0.9 | 532 | − 217 |
| Harney | 6,200 | 6,113 | + 0.8 | + 3.2 | 374 | − 326 |
| Hood River | 12,400 | 12,740 | − 3.0 | + 5.3 | 676 | − 1,059 |
| Jackson | 63,000 | 58,510 | + 7.7 | + 0.1 | 2,769 | + 1,762 |
| Jefferson | 5,900 | 5,536 | + 6.3 | − 0.8 | 479 | − 128 |
| Josephine | 29,200 | 26,542 | + 9.9 | + 0.2 | 1,045 | + 1,595 |
| Klamath | 42,100 | 42,150 | − 0.1 | + 0.3 | 2,425 | − 2,457 |
| Lake | 6,600 | 6,649 | − 0.8 | − 2.4 | 372 | − 429 |
| Lane | 144,700 | 125,776 | +15.0 | + 3.9 | 8,619 | +10,267 |
| Lincoln | 23,200 | 21,308 | + 8.9 | − 0.1 | 1,049 | + 843 |
| Linn | 58,600 | 54,317 | + 7.8 | + 0.4 | 3,409 | + 851 |
| Malheur | 22,400 | 23,223 | − 3.5 | − 2.2 | 1,432 | − 2,249 |
| Marion | 104,700 | 101,401 | + 3.3 | + 0.2 | 4,506 | − 1,156 |
| Morrow | 4,900 | 4,783 | + 1.8 | − 4.4 | 234 | − 149 |
| Multnomah | 110,400 | 97,909 | +12.8 | + 5.1 | 5,977 | + 6,547 |
| Portland | 392,800 | 373,628 | + 5.1 | + 1.4 | 11,794 | + 7,345 |
| Polk | 24,600 | 26,317 | − 6.5 | − 1.9 | 1,341 | − 3,058 |
| Sherman | 2,100 | 2,271 | − 5.2 | + 6.4 | 68 | − 187 |
| Tillamook | 21,700 | 18,606 | +16.8 | + 2.7 | 1,453 | + 1,667 |
| Umatilla | 47,600 | 41,703 | +14.2 | + 0.2 | 2,655 | + 3,269 |
| Union | 18,000 | 17,962 | • | − 4.1 | 652 | − 650 |
| Wallowa | 6,700 | 7,264 | − 7.6 | − 1.7 | 364 | − 914 |
| Wasco | 19,300 | 15,552 | +24.1 | +13.4 | 748 | + 3,008 |
| Washington | 70,500 | 61,269 | +15.0 | + 5.3 | 3,651 | + 5,565 |
| Wheeler | 3,500 | 3,313 | + 5.4 | + 0.7 | 235 | − 55 |
| Yamhill | 32,400 | 33,484 | − 3.2 | − 0.1 | 1,435 | − 2,503 |
| Total | 1,636,800 | 1,521,341 | + 7.6 | + 2.2 | 77,178 | +38,242 |

• Less than .05 per cent change.

cialty stock depend upon the dimensions desired and the quality of the lumber. In 1947, the f.o.b. price per thousand feet for green two- to four-inch myrtle lumber was $200: seasoned two- to four-inch stock was as much as $500 per thousand. As stated above, prices on burls are quoted by the pound and depend entirely on quality and size. There is not much active competition among myrtle manufacturers in buying logs. There are several loggers who have these factories as regular customers, and who log the myrtle as the factory orders for logs come to them.

Because myrtlewood products are entirely handmade and the manufacturing process demands skill and much handling of each article, considerable value is added by processing, and the finished products are usually quite high in price. Retail prices may vary some at different shops, but they cannot be too much out of line, since retail competition is lively.

There is not much competition with woods of other kinds. Some dealers carry small articles made from other woods, but the quality of the myrtlewood products is generally conceded to be in a class by itself. Even the logs cost more to begin with, the work is all done by hand, and the beauty of the coloring and the great variety of the grains make the myrtle products difficult to compare with similar articles made from other woods.

It is quite likely that a greater demand for these products could be created by intensive advertising and if more salesmen called on gift and hobbycraft shops. However, it is doubtful if the cost could be reduced so long as it is so expensive to locate, log, and season the wood. It would be difficult to cut costs without sacrificing quality. Choice myrtle is becoming more and more difficult to find, and the operators might face a shortage of raw materials before many years if the volume of consumption increases too sharply. Because of these difficulties, large companies are not likely to be interested in manufacturing myrtlewood. As long as it remains in a quasi-cottage-industry condition, the demand is likely to fluctuate with the tourist trade, without much total increase in consumption of raw materials.

The number of hired workers in myrtlewood factories is very small, ranging from none in the greater number of establishments to nine to twelve in the larger ones. In some shops a sales person may be hired part time during the rush season. In the factories, turners, sanders, polishers, and finish turners are hired. Although each of these is a skilled worker, the finish turner needs a higher degree of skill and is paid more than the sanders or polishers. These skills are marketable in other lines of woodworking, and persons who acquire such skills in a myrtlewood factory should be able to find work elsewhere because of this experience. Both men and women are employed at each of these jobs, and women become as competent as the men. Few of the myrtlewood workers are unionized.

**Summary.** The supply of large, old-growth timber has diminished until very little is left except that which is marked for preservation by state and Federal organizations or groups such as Save the Myrtle Woods, Inc. What does remain grows in such inaccessible places that it is difficult and expensive to bring it out. Also, because of the qualities of the myrtlewood, its susceptibility to infestation by insects and rot, and the difficulty of measuring the quality of the wood before logging, large companies are not likely at present to become interested in taking out myrtle timber. Myrtle loggers feel quite certain that, as long as it is so hard to find a fast and cheap method of logging, the available resources will not be exhausted by present methods. The amount cut is likely to remain small for some years to come. However, if a sharply increased demand should greatly increase consumption, the industry would face a possible exhaustion of desirable myrtle timber in a comparatively short time.

There is plenty of second-growth myrtle, which is sometimes considered a forest-management problem, because in regions where the soft woods have been logged or where frequent fires occur the myrtle monopolizes the choice sites with its clumps of branching shrublike growth and its enormous root system.

During the last fifteen years or so, there has been a definite trend away from the use of myrtle for veneer, paneling, indoor trim, and flooring, while its use for handmade turnery and novelties has been increasing. These trends are due to the expense and difficulty of handling the wood successfully in veneers and the increasing scarcity of superior burls. The novelty business has grown because of the increased tourist trade.

It is not likely that the myrtlewood business will become "big business," because of the limited resources of raw materials, and the expense, time, and difficulty involved in handling the wood. It would be regrettable if such a rare and distinctive wood were ever to be used for any but quality products.

There is need for research regarding the practicability of conservation of myrtle timber. There is also need for an up-to-date and accurate inventory of myrtlewood resources and the quality of the timber.

# PORTLAND FOOD PRICES—FEBRUARY 1954

The University of Oregon Bureau of Business Research, working with data collected by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, reports that, of 73 foods priced in Portland in mid-February, 27 were higher than in mid-January, 29 were lower, and 17 were unchanged. Canned goods showed slight declines. Largest decline was noted in the price of lettuce, and largest rise in the price of coffee, both 6 cents.

| Commodity and Unit | In Cents: Average Feb. 15 1954 | Change from Last Month | Feb. Range of Prices: High | Low |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CEREALS & BAKERY PRODUCTS:** | | | | |
| Cereals: | | | | |
| Flour, wheat (5 lbs.) | 54.8 | ..... | 62 | 52 |
| Corn flakes (12 oz.) | 22.4 | ..... | 25 | 22 |
| Corn meal (lb.) | 12.3 | — .3 | 14 | 11 |
| Rice (lb.) | 23.9 | ..... | 29 | 23 |
| Rolled oats (20 oz.) | 20.4 | .1 | 22 | 20 |
| Biscuit mix (20 oz.) | 27.1 | .2 | 29 | 24 |
| Bakery products: | | | | |
| Bread, white, per loaf (lb.) | 18.2 | .1 | 18 | 17 |
| Vanilla cookies (7 oz.) | 24.9 | — .8 | 28 | 20 |
| Soda crackers (lb.) | 28.2 | ..... | 29 | 28 |
| **MEATS, POULTRY & FISH:** | | | | |
| Meats: | | | | |
| Beef: | | | | |
| Round steak (lb.) | 93.4 | 1.6 | 99 | 85 |
| Rib roast (lb.) | 79.5 | .5 | 85 | 75 |
| Chuck roast (lb.) | 56.9 | 1.2 | 59 | 49 |
| Frankfurters (lb.) | 52.0 | ..... | 60 | 45 |
| Hamburger (lb.) | 40.6 | ..... | 59 | 35 |
| Veal: | | | | |
| Cutlets (lb.) | 110.5 | ..... | 129 | 85 |
| Pork: | | | | |
| Chops (lb.) | 89.1 | —3.0 | 98 | 79 |
| Bacon, sliced (lb.) | 90.4 | 4.1 | 99 | 85 |
| Ham, whole (lb.) | 71.1 | —3.2 | 81 | 69 |
| Lunch. meat, canned (12 oz.) | 50.8 | — .1 | 57 | 49 |
| Lamb: | | | | |
| Leg (lb.) | 74.7 | 1.0 | 83 | 69 |
| Poultry: | | | | |
| Fryers, N.Y. dr. (lb.) | 52.2 | 3.9 | 59 | 39 |
| Fish: | | | | |
| Salmon, canned (lb.) | 50.2 | — .8 | 59 | 39 |
| Salmon, fresh (lb.) | 72.3 | ..... | 99 | 69 |
| Halibut, fresh (lb.) | 63.4 | .7 | 69 | 59 |
| Tuna, canned (7 oz.) | 40.5 | .6 | 43 | 39 |
| **DAIRY PRODUCTS:** | | | | |
| Butter (lb.) | 77.8 | .1 | 83 | 76 |
| Cheese, Amer. proc. (lb.) | 58.5 | ..... | 60 | 58 |
| Milk: | | | | |
| Fresh, delivered (qt.) | 22.0 | ..... | 22 | 22 |
| Fresh, grocery (qt.) | 21.7 | ..... | 22 | 22 |
| Evaporated (14½ oz. can) | 14.4 | ..... | 17 | 14 |
| Ice cream (pt.) | 27.3 | — .2 | 33 | 25 |
| Eggs, Fresh (doz.) | 64.3 | —1.4 | 69 | 59 |
| **FRUITS AND VEGETABLES:** | | | | |
| Frozen: | | | | |
| Strawberries, sl. (12 oz.) | 34.2 | — .9 | 42 | 28 |
| Orange juice, conc. (6 oz.) | 18.7 | —2.2 | 25 | 14 |
| Peas (12 oz.) | 22.2 | — .2 | 25 | 21 |
| Green beans (10 oz.) | 23.1 | .3 | 27 | 21 |

| Commodity and Unit | In Cents: Average Feb. 15 1954 | Change from Last Month | Feb. Range of Prices: High | Low |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FRUITS & VEGETABLES (cont.):** | | | | |
| Fresh: | | | | |
| Apples (lb.) | 15.8 | 3.2 | 19 | 10 |
| Bananas (lb.) | 19.6 | .1 | 23 | 19 |
| Oranges (size 200, doz.) | 57.3 | 2.5 | 87 | 44 |
| Beans, green (lb.) | * | ..... | ..... | ..... |
| Cabbage (lb.) | 8.4 | 2.2 | 10 | 5 |
| Carrots (bunch) | 12.3 | — .1 | 15 | 10 |
| Lettuce (head) | 14.5 | —6.3 | 23 | 12 |
| Onions, yellow (lb.) | 5.5 | .1 | 10 | 4 |
| Potatoes, white (15 lb.) | 65.9 | 1.8 | 94 | 58 |
| Sweet potatoes (lb.) | 14.9 | .5 | 19 | 12 |
| Tomatoes (lb.) | 34.8 | —2.8 | 47 | 19 |
| Celery (lb.) | 14.6 | 1.2 | 19 | 10 |
| Lemons (lb.) | 18.7 | — .3 | 27 | 15 |
| Grapefruit (each) | 14.4 | — .3 | 21 | 10 |
| Canned: | | | | |
| Peaches (no. 2½ can) | 29.6 | — .3 | 33 | 27 |
| Pineapple (no. 2½ can) | 36.1 | — .4 | 40 | 34 |
| Orange juice (46 oz.) | 37.3 | —2.1 | 49 | 35 |
| Fruit cocktail (no. 2½ can) | 10.2 | — .1 | 45 | 39 |
| Beans with pork (16 oz.) | 14.1 | ..... | 15 | 14 |
| Corn, cream style (no. 303 can) | 19.1 | — .2 | 23 | 17 |
| Tomatoes (no. 2½ can) | 23.2 | — .6 | 29 | 21 |
| Peas (no. 303 can) | 19.8 | — .2 | 23 | 17 |
| Vegetable soup (11 oz.) | 11.4 | — .3 | 16 | 11 |
| Baby foods (4½-4 ⅝ oz.) | 9.1 | ..... | 10 | 9 |
| Dried: | | | | |
| Prunes (lb.) | 28.7 | .2 | 39 | 26 |
| Navy beans (lb.) | 19.7 | .2 | 25 | 18 |
| **BEVERAGES:** | | | | |
| Coffee (lb.) | 99.3 | 6.1 | 115 | 92 |
| Tea (¼ lb. pkg.) | 35.5 | ..... | 41 | 33 |
| Cola drink (6 bottles) | 34.7 | .1 | 42 | 33 |
| **FATS AND OILS:** | | | | |
| Lard (lb.) | 29.6 | .7 | 33 | 25 |
| Shortening, hydrog. (lb.) | 31.7 | — .3 | 39 | 32 |
| Salad dressing (pt.) | 38.1 | .1 | 45 | 37 |
| Margarine, colored (lb.) | 31.1 | — .1 | 35 | 30 |
| Peanut butter (lb.) | 52.7 | ..... | 56 | 49 |
| **SUGAR AND SWEETS:** | | | | |
| Sugar (5 lb.) | 56.6 | — .1 | 62 | 55 |
| Corn syrup (24 oz.) | 24.9 | ..... | 28 | 24 |
| Grape jelly (12 oz. jar) | 26.7 | — .4 | 32 | 23 |
| Chocolate bar (1 oz.) | 4.4 | ..... | 5 | 4 |
| **MISCELLANEOUS:** | | | | |
| Gherkins, (7½ oz.) | 29.7 | ..... | 39 | 22 |
| Catsup (14 oz.) | 23.0 | — .6 | 32 | 17 |
| Gelatin dessert | 9.0 | ..... | 10 | 8 |

* Insufficient number of quotations to obtain a reliable average price.

# CURRENT BUSINESS TRENDS IN OREGON

**Department-Store Sales.** Sales of Portland department stores have been somewhat lower since the beginning of 1954 than they were a year ago. This decline is larger than that for the United States generally and for other Pacific Coast cities. The percentage of changes in the value of sales compared with the corresponding periods a year ago are shown below:

| | Week Ending Feb. 13, 1954 | 4 Weeks Ending Feb. 13,1954 | Calendar Year to Feb. 13, 1954 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Portland | −12 | −10 | −4 |
| Los Angeles | − 5 | − 5 | −3 |
| San Francisco-Oakland | −10 | − 7 | −5 |
| Seattle | − 7 | − 7 | −7 |
| Tacoma | −22 | − 8 | −7 |
| United States | − 1 | − 1 | −1 |

**Multnomah County Real-Estate Transactions.** During January 1954 there were 874 real-estate transactions amounting to $8,307,595 in Multnomah County. Of these, 630 involved residences, the sales price of which was $5,699,912; 192 were vacant properties, $516,594; and 52 were business properties, $2,091,089. Additional figures are:

| | Jan. 1954 | Dec. 1953 | Jan. 1953 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of sales | 874 | 1,013 | 1,219 |
| Value of sales | $8,307,595 | $8,753,279 | $10,155,321 |
| Number of mortgages | 826 | 924 | 960 |
| Amount loaned | $6,004,296 | $6,913,385 | $ 6,850,987 |
| Number of sheriff's deeds | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| Amount of sheriff's deeds | $ 20,692 | $ 31,250 | $ 4,860 |
| Average residential sales price | $ 9,047 | $ 9,124 | $ 8,635 |

**Employment.** Nonagricultural employment in Oregon was 1,200 less in January 1954 than in January 1953, according to the State Unemployment Compensation Commission. There was a decline of 25,000 between December 15, 1953 and January 15, 1954, which was about 11 per cent greater than the decline experienced a year ago.

The 25,000 decline this year represents 8,500 fewer workers in manufacturing jobs and 16,500 fewer in nonmanufacturing work. The principal component of the decline in manufacturing was lumber and wood products, which accounted for 5,600 (compared with 3,800 a year earlier). Nonmanufacturing employment declined almost the same amount this year as last (16,500 in 1954 and 16,100 in 1953), the most important item being a drop of 9,300 in retail trade. The total employment figures follow:

| | Jan. 1954 | Dec. 1953 | Jan. 1953 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 431,100 | 456,100 | 432,300 |
| Manufacturing | 120,500 | 129,000 | 125,400 |
| Nonmanufacturing | 310,600 | 327,100 | 306,900 |

**Lumber.** The West Coast Lumbermen's Association reports that snow, ice, and sleet took such a heavy toll of Douglas-fir lumber production in the Pacific Northwest during January 1954 that output dropped to the lowest figure since 1950. This trend continued on into February; the output for the week ending February 6 was 9 per cent below the same week a year earlier.

The figures for the Douglas-fir industry for January along with the preceding month and the same month last year are given below. All figures are in thousands of feet board measure.

| | Jan. 1954 | Dec. 1953 | Jan. 1953 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average weekly production | 183,332 | 168,947 | 195,584 |
| Average weekly orders | 193,636 | 174,571 | 199,467 |
| Average weekly shipments | 187,038 | 167,180 | 186,128 |
| Unfilled orders, end of month | 777,337 | 749,626 | 878,837 |
| Lumber inventory, end of month | 1,061,470 | 1,077,033 | 1,039,226 |

## BANK DEBITS

**Bank debits represent the dollar value of the checks drawn against individual deposits. Payment for approximately 90 per cent of all goods, property, and services is by check. Bank debits are regarded as indicators of the general trend of business, though their value for this purpose may be impaired by substantial changes in the level of prices. The Bureau of Business Research collects bank deposits from 121 banks and branches monthly. On occasion, the totals for the same month in different issues of the *Oregon Business Review* are not directly comparable because of necessary adjustments in basic data.**

| *Marketing Districts* | Number of Banks Reporting | Debits Jan. 1954 | Debits Dec. 1953 | Debits Jan. 1953 | Jan. 1954 Compared with Dec. 1953 | Jan. 1954 Compared with Jan. 1953 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Oregon | 121 | $1,282,024,171 | $1,306,544,021 | $1,313,425,027 | − 1.9 | − 2.4 |
| Portland (Portland, Hillsboro, Oregon City, etc.) | 33 | 825,847,491 | 808,396,022 | 801,633,262 | + 2.2 | + 3.0 |
| Lower Willamette Valley (Salem, McMinnville, etc.) | 16 | 100,176,967 | 110,531,032 | 100,107,418 | − 9.4 | + .1 |
| Upper Willamette Valley (Albany, Corvallis, Eugene) | 17 | 110,047,401 | 119,872,[illegible] | [illegible]738,488 | − 8.2 | −15.2 |
| North Oregon Coast (Astoria, Tillamook, etc.) | 5 | 23,802,377 | 22,84[illegible] | [illegible]862,372 | + 4.2 | −12.1 |
| Douglas, Coos, Curry counties | 9 | 39,481,169 | 44,081,[illegible] | [illegible]847,693 | −10.4 | − 5.9 |
| Southern Oregon (Ashland, Medford, Grants Pass) | 6 | 47,586,669 | 53,373,[illegible] | [illegible]930,587 | −10.9 | −11.8 |
| Upper Columbia River (The Dalles, Hood River, etc.) | 7 | 23,007,874 | 24,067,593 | 25,506,025 | − 4.4 | − 9.8 |
| Pendleton area | 6 | 23,879,905 | 24,027,888 | 28,147,010 | − .6 | −15.2 |
| Central Oregon (Bend, Prineville, Redmond) | 5 | 21,669,809 | 24,222,589 | 25,823,810 | −10.5 | −16.1 |
| Klamath Falls, Lakeview area | 5 | 27,519,583 | 28,963,375 | 31,785,644 | − 5.0 | −13.4 |
| Baker, La Grande area | 7 | 21,657,145 | 25,120,383 | 25,693,421 | −13.8 | −15.7 |
| Burns, Ontario, Nyssa | 5 | 17,347,781 | 21,042,966 | 22,049,267 | −17.6 | −21.3 |

## BUILDING PERMITS

**Building permits give an indication of building operations planned rather than actual construction under way. Care must be taken, in interpreting these data, to allow for the lag which may elapse between the issuance of the permit and the beginning of actual construction. The data have been collected by the Bureau of Business Research.**

| | New Residential Jan. 1954 | New Nonresidential Jan. 1954 | Additions, Alterations & Repairs Jan. 1954 | Totals Jan. 1954 | Totals Dec. 1953 | Totals Jan. 1953 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Albany | $ 40,000 | $ 23,000 | $ 800 | $ 63,800 | $ 12,400 | $ ..... |
| Astoria | ..... | ..... | 7,250 | 7,250 | 4,545 | ..... |
| Bend | 10,000 | 750 | 4,640 | 15,390 | 33,181 | 19,750 |
| Coos Bay | 13,000 | 2,654 | 2,965 | 18,619 | 61,725 | 21,350 |
| Corvallis | 8,800 | 600 | ..... | 9,400 | 31,950 | 38,140 |
| Eugene | 96,000 | 19,075 | 37,198 | 152,273 | 186,161 | 113,500 |
| Forest Grove | 35,700 | ..... | 3,600 | 39,300 | 13,875 | 10,700 |
| Grants Pass | 21,880 | 910 | 1,420 | 27,210 | 99,835 | 114,190 |
| Klamath Falls | ..... | ..... | 13,300 | 13,300 | 9,000 | 15,000 |
| La Grande | ..... | 1,300 | 4,260 | 5,560 | 8,125 | ..... |
| Medford | 97,500 | 335,819 | 13,600 | 446,919 | 68,487 | 19,000 |
| Milton-Freewater | 27,500 | 23,500 | 14,628 | 65,628 | 28,200 | 13,000 |
| North Bend | ..... | 2,150 | 3,519 | 5,669 | 9,213 | 13,600 |
| Oregon City | ..... | 100 | 3,000 | 3,100 | 3,430 | 19,500 |
| Pendleton | 14,000 | 500 | 18,700 | 33,200 | 16,100 | 18,000 |
| Portland | 1,517,550 | 347,665 | 548,565 | 2,413,780 | 2,720,535 | 1,334,095 |
| Roseburg | 44,824 | 29,823 | 17,090 | 91,737 | 80,055 | ..... |
| Salem | 172,500 | 174,000 | 36,515 | 383,015 | 269,040 | 144,000 |
| Springfield | 10,500 | 60,000 | 5,650 | 76,150 | 71,350 | 82,670 |
| The Dalles | 11,712 | 1,250 | 31,000 | 43,962 | 91,770 | 41,699 |
| 19 other communities | 86,500 | 37,225 | 16,220 | 169,945 | 216,460 | 136,212 |
| Total | $2,210,966 | $1,060,351 | $ 813,920 | $4,085,237 | $4,069,037 | $2,247,406 |